

Today you may be seeing a physician assistant. Physician assistants provide high quality health care services to patients and to the community. We hope this brochure will answer any questions you may have. If you should have further questions, ask the physician.

Q. What is a Physician Assistant?

A. A Physician Assistant, or PA, is a licensed and highly skilled health care professional, trained to provide patient evaluation, education, and health care services. A PA works with a physician to provide medical care and guidance needed by a patient.

Q. What are the training requirements to become a PA?

A. A PA must attend a specialized medical training program associated with a medical school that includes classroom studies and clinical experience. An Academic degree and/or certificate is awarded upon graduation. Many PAs have two or four year academic degrees before entering a PA training program. Most PA training programs require prior health care experience.

Q. Is a PA licensed by the State of California?

A. Yes. To practice in California, each PA must pass a rigorous national examination before being licensed by the Physician Assistant Committee, which is part of the California Department of Consumer Affairs' Medical Board of California.

Q. What additional duties does the Physician Assistant Committee perform?

A. The Physician Assistant Committee is responsible for consumer protection, making recommendations about the scope of practice of PAs, and providing information about PAs to the health care community and others.

Q. What types of services are provided by a PA?

A. A PA performs many diagnostic, preventative, and health maintenance services. These services include, but are not limited to, the following list.

- Taking health histories
- Performing physical examinations
- Ordering X-rays and laboratory tests
- Performing routine diagnostic tests
- Establishing diagnoses
- Treating and managing patient health problems
- Administering immunizations and injections
- Instructing and counseling patients
- Providing continuing care to patients in the home, hospital, or extended care facility
- Providing referrals within the health care system
- Performing minor surgery
- Providing preventative health care services
- Acting as first or second assistants during surgery
- Responding to life-threatening emergencies

Q. How does a PA work with their supervising physicians?

A. Each PA must be supervised by a physician. The physician supervises the PA either when both are at the same location or by telephone. The supervising physician must always be available to the PA should the need arise. The supervising physician is responsible for following each patient's progress.

Q. Is there any difference in fees charged by a PA and a physician for the same service?

A. In many medical offices the charges are the same regardless of which health care provider is seen. As a general rule, the PA spends a great deal of time with patients. A PA emphasizes primary care and patient education, which may reduce the number of return visits.

Q. Is a PA covered by malpractice insurance?

A. Yes. Generally the PA works under the insurance policy of the employing physician or health facility. PAs may also carry their own malpractice insurance.

Q. Do most insurance policies cover care provided by a PA?

A. Yes, most do. Some carriers bill for the PA directly, while others bill through the supervising physician. All reimbursements for Medi-Cal usually are made through the supervising physician or the employing institution. Medi-Cal reimburses for services provided by the PA in hospitals and skilled nursing facilities, in addition to primary care services.

For more information about physician assistants, a specific physician assistant, licensing requirements, or to file a complaint, contact:

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